

# **Cyclones in High Northern Latitudes**

**by**

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For  
Deborah Stretton  
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Her dignity  
could not be effaced  
by the quality  
of her clothes.  
I knew this  
back near the border  
when I was not satisfied.  
I recommend highly  
a new approach  
to the situation.  
Such was the time  
spent together.  
What could I offer her  
that would not  
betray her?  
Money was cold comfort,  
bleak as the weather.  
There would be  
half a smile  
and polite rejection  
and words  
beneath her breath  
in a language  
not spoken since  
a time  
before words  
were written.  
All this  
I tell you now.  
A time  
there was  
when such  
could not be broached.  
Not even  
by those  
whose position  
it was to assist.  
Why do I  
go on this way?

These memories  
forbid  
true contemplation.  
If only  
the sight of her  
had been enough.  
If only  
the mention  
of her now  
was enough

to assuage  
the inevitable  
distance.  
These things arrive  
in old cases  
full of letters,  
photographs  
vanished with age.  
She emerges  
as a shape  
on their surfaces  
and I remember,  
but I do not recall  
how it began.  
That would be conjecture.  
Still,  
the images return.  
As I went out this morning  
I had misgivings  
about Netscape.  
Not the ordinary kind  
that many surfers  
must have  
from time to time.  
(Such fears  
are seldom  
realized and  
as such  
should be  
summarily discounted.)  
No, my fears  
were more base.

If it were  
in my power,  
I would relate  
them to you  
but given  
that time has  
made them  
unspeakable,  
I have to demur  
from doing so.  
At first  
we suspected  
the machinery,  
complications  
in the algorithms,  
a feedback loop  
intense enough

to penetrate  
the human skull,  
but that was all folklore.  
It remains  
in the air,  
it appears  
on television programs  
designed to appeal to  
the superstitious.  
Beyond that  
it has no value at all.

I fear that something  
more sinister  
is at work,  
if I could only wipe  
the pixels  
from my eyes.  
But instead  
I keep hearing  
talk about renovation,  
which appears  
almost as a  
remembrance  
to the visiting many.  
Yet, I told them before,  
in three differing disguises,  
that I will not  
enter the gardens,  
nor alarm  
the inmates of the house.  
And I promise  
never to deprive  
the ladies  
of their senses  
or become a burden  
to their families.  
I know of such things  
from a past time,  
and the trouble it can cause.  
But today  
my extension  
has been granted  
and I can proceed  
on my course.  
The maps and blueprints  
are laid on a table before me,  
the maid bows  
and politely  
backs out of the room.

At first glance  
they seem completely indecipherable,  
an inscrutable tract left by aliens.  
I have difficulty believing  
that I,  
in another time and form,  
created them myself.  
Gradually, with study,  
the language  
and specialized terminology  
return to me  
and I become  
comfortable enough  
to begin to make  
the necessary changes  
to allow for the demands  
of my patrons.  
The greatest difficulty  
may be with the terraces  
or the third,  
secret hand,  
of the gardeners  
that tend them.

I have heard  
that these gardeners  
have relinquished  
any notion  
of scientific impartiality,  
hence the  
dubious nature  
of their findings.  
Me, I tried  
to enter into things  
but my maps  
were discarded,  
and the institute  
carefully audited  
my outgoings.  
Now I am  
the subject  
of councils  
who have denied me  
my meanderings  
within the hallways  
of pedantry.  
How I long  
for the days of  
the river,  
where I could rest easy

on my boat  
and cook kippers  
before the tornadoes.  
I had a wife then,  
and a son on the way.  
But to dwell on the past  
just serves to bring  
the present into grief,  
and I can see  
the clouds forming now  
and a storm brewing.  
Was freedom as tangible then  
as I remember it being,  
now that  
it is so elusive?  
Now, when fear  
is the only  
common coin,  
the storms  
seem more ominous.

When I study the clouds  
I find things written there  
I am unable to comprehend.  
When I met her,  
those first months,  
we had  
complete command  
of the skies.  
Not a drop fell  
that did not  
on some level,  
catch our attention.  
The whole earth  
was ripe  
with meaning  
and we needed  
no intermediary.  
Now I hustle  
though my days  
to stay ahead  
of the guards,  
the dogs of cognizance  
who know nothing at all  
except greed  
and revenge  
and subservience  
to masters that  
none of us have seen  
or believe to exist.

Today, though,  
I've got my eye  
on some land,  
but I'm scared in case  
I'm too far gone  
to turn around.  
When you're on the run  
perspective gets lost,  
and you tend to  
go with resistance.  
She knew that too;  
at least she said she did.  
If only the sound of her voice  
could be with me now.  
But sound here  
is a much  
desired thing.  
I cannot make it  
and I cannot  
hear it,  
lest I be discovered  
in my hiding place.  
When you're on the run  
you have to make  
these sacrifices.  
She knew that too.  
From my vantage point  
on this promontory,  
I can see all around.  
Sometimes I look up;  
sometimes I look down.  
Things don't  
look too good.  
That may be  
well understood  
from my condition.  
I am fading  
like a falling leaf.

Events rush  
toward me  
in waves.  
I am unable  
to discern  
if this is purely  
subjective  
or if reality,  
nature,  
the world  
as we observe it



is actually rising  
and receding  
in regular intervals.  
I pace my room –  
a circular stone cloister  
built into a  
high cliff face  
on the edge  
of the sea.  
I suspect monks,  
perhaps of some heretic order,  
carved their dwelling here  
to live in peace  
with only the sound  
of the waves,  
their prayers and chants  
to keep them alive  
and free of their oppressors.  
Just now  
she stepped  
in from outside  
and told me  
the fish we caught this morning  
were cooked  
and ready to eat.  
I didn't bother to answer  
or even turn away  
from the window.  
I learned long ago  
to distinguish between  
strong memories and  
whatever the world is,  
rushing in now again  
with a large bird  
on the horizon,  
or is that some sort  
of flying machine?  
I was always  
like a kingfisher  
to her especially  
after a day's labour  
tilling the soil  
on land  
I would never own.  
The daily struggles  
almost made me refuse  
the fish brought to me  
but for her kind smile  
and simple measures  
that helped to defuse

my incipient anger.  
But even now,  
centuries later,  
I am forbidden  
certain things  
that any other man  
can easily claim.  
But we're still here  
after all these years,  
and I'm still trying  
to work out  
what went wrong.  
I hated my life  
because of a beautiful woman,  
and because of this  
I ended up in insurance.  
It seems like  
all the women I love  
are with inappropriate men.

Do they seem  
inappropriate to me  
because I wish  
to possess them  
and cannot,  
or because  
of some desire  
they have  
to live in situations  
in which they are destined  
to be dissatisfied?  
I pour over the figures  
in the actuary tables.  
I am obsessed with them.  
They hold the traces,  
the movement  
of the beast  
inside the herd,  
expose its true motives.  
No beast  
that ever drew a plow  
through hard ground  
could match the strength  
or malevolence  
that dwells  
in the meticulous methods  
of those numbers.  
That beast  
is still in the wild,  
unknown,

unnamed,  
and unaccountable  
to any law,  
even its own proclivities.  
Just at the moment  
you think you have  
discovered its physics  
it explodes into  
wild distortions –  
earthquakes  
where no fault line  
was previously known,  
cyclones  
in high northern latitudes.  
Still, I must pursue  
something,  
if only to distract me  
from her memory.  
Sometimes  
in my dreams,  
she merges  
with the beast  
in the statistics.  
When I wake,  
for a moment,  
I wonder  
if they  
are one and the same.  
And now I know  
they are,  
for I remember her  
in front of the  
turquoise door  
in Dublin Street.  
We both played  
our best hand then,  
but I lost;  
or did I really win?  
She bound me  
so fast  
that I half expected  
to go mad.  
It is fortunate  
that I am still  
coherent  
given the shame  
that I befell  
when riding  
that wicked horse.  
But you are always

in my thoughts,  
no matter  
what part  
of the world  
you are in.  
And I have suffered  
for your love,  
even though  
I knew a great deal  
about law.  
But woman,  
be still now,  
for you are watched  
by my father  
and all his servants,  
and I cannot  
be responsible  
for his actions.  
One day you will  
experience my love,  
as if captured  
in my bower.

So I wait  
for the opportune moment.  
I devise plans  
for your rescue,  
your recovery  
and rediscovery  
with such meticulous detail  
that none of my kin  
would be able  
to decipher it  
in the unlikely event  
they stumble  
upon its cloister.  
But there was something  
I had not anticipated,  
more virulent  
and sinister  
than any evil before.  
Over the hills  
they came in hordes,  
led by two men on horseback  
with a cross emblazoned  
on their chests.  
Each of the swarm  
carried a knife,  
sickle,  
pruning hook,

any sharp implement  
they had at hand.  
It was obvious  
that they intended  
to kill  
every living creature  
in their path.  
If it had not been  
for the small cellar  
I'd dug beneath the floor  
of my shack  
I would have been  
another among  
the numberless  
thousands  
they sent to ground.  
Nor would I  
have been able to  
learn the reason  
for the scourge  
or visit the aftermath  
searching,  
hoping  
against deepest dread  
that I would find her.

That I would find her  
and save her  
from these men  
in case her love  
became transferred  
to them  
like that time in Reno.  
Me standing helpless  
amongst the hordes;  
my sorrow and care  
just words  
she might  
cast away.  
But such men  
can be  
beyond reason,  
and whilst  
the owl slept  
I left that place  
never to revisit.  
I later heard  
of her demise  
while underground  
near Sun Valley.

For many years,  
the authorities  
held me  
as the culprit,  
and my hiding continued.  
Yet, occasionally  
my mind  
goes back to when  
I was carefree;  
when we kissed  
fifty times  
before the window  
where  
she stood.

Each of those kisses  
opened a world  
and each of those worlds  
contained their own histories.  
Geological ages  
come and go,  
species ascend  
and decline.  
For these several years  
I had forgotten anything  
beyond the  
passion  
of those kisses.  
Their fire  
entranced me  
and I was  
bound  
to a single  
place and time.  
I could not  
forget.  
Such is the dilemma  
of the broken hearted.  
Slowly however,  
as I became  
more secure  
in my hiding place  
and began  
to become familiar  
to the people  
in that town  
under another name,  
wearing a new face,  
those worlds  
begin to reappear

in my dreams.  
Then,  
even in daylight,  
I would get glimpses.  
It was as if  
the scene that lay  
before me  
slid away  
like a veil  
and behind it,  
if only for an instant,  
I glimpsed  
the 50 worlds  
passing  
through one another.  
A moment of chaos  
and confusion,  
then clarity,  
then the familiar  
day to day  
world returned.  
For now I remain  
disconsolate  
because I cannot  
remember  
how to enter  
those worlds,  
or even  
if it is possible  
to do so.  
Is she  
lost forever  
to me?  
Were those worlds  
really mine?  
For a time,  
there was talk  
of rehabilitation,  
and the need  
for observation.  
But my instincts  
drove me  
far away  
from that sort of safety.  
Now there's something  
about broken bridges  
and time.  
I couldn't tell her  
anything  
that I had not

told the rest.  
Sometimes  
for a fleeting second  
I see her dress again  
or the shadow  
from her body  
stretched out  
across the bed.  
Such images  
have sustained me  
as I work out  
my extra time –  
free from the outside  
but trapped within.  
I'm just walking  
through reservations  
to recapture land  
I once saw.  
Don't know  
if it's still there,  
but I've learned much in trying.

It's another day  
in another place.  
I'm uncertain where.  
I look out the window.  
The Bowery again.  
How did I get here?  
There was the taxi  
in Istanbul.  
I remember that clearly  
because  
beneath a flap on back  
of the front seat  
was a picture  
of you,  
scantily clad,  
apparently  
from a silent porno,  
1920s.  
That must be  
what sent me here,  
waking  
in this horrible  
hotel room,  
staring out windows  
that have not  
been cleaned  
in half a century.  
Who knows



what lives  
in that dust?  
I cough into my hand.  
Something wet.  
I look down.  
Blood.  
Is this  
the start  
of something  
new?  
Tuberculosis  
or just  
the old stigmata  
returned  
to get the last laugh?

Either way  
time drifts on.  
My lust for you  
raises more than questions.  
But to  
question  
in this climate  
would be a mistake.  
I don't know  
if I'm still being  
followed.  
The warnings I received  
indicate that I am.  
But then again  
your contacts  
were never  
that secure,  
and I was  
intercepted  
when I tried  
to cross the border.  
You knew  
I was never  
a security risk  
yet you exposed  
my cover  
and left me here  
to bargain  
for my freedom.  
This blood  
I look at  
on my hand  
now remains  
for you.

Concordances  
could not  
even make me sway;  
neither could vistas  
and timbrels and  
the various options  
yet open to me.  
This blood  
on my hand  
speaks clearly  
for us now.  
We have  
nothing left  
to barter or to sell.

From my position  
at the window  
I can see clearly  
down both ends  
of the narrow  
clay street.  
Wide enough  
for foot traffic only,  
or small carts  
drawn by beleaguered  
donkeys or goats.  
In the mornings  
the sellers  
make their rounds,  
wailing  
in the thin cool air  
the names  
of the fruits and vegetables  
that are native  
to this soil  
or the few  
ornaments and devices  
the poor artisans  
cobble together  
from scraps of  
metal,  
glass,  
fabric and leather.

Just yesterday  
I bought an oil lamp,  
then spent  
the remainder  
of the morning  
finding fuel for it.

Last night  
when the cold dark settled in  
I lit it  
and immediately  
saw your shadow  
move across the floor,  
up the wall,  
and dance  
in the rafters  
until I passed out  
drinking the  
thick green liquor  
the locals consume.  
I have no idea  
from what  
it is concocted,  
but it produces  
a dreamless sleep  
and no residual  
effect beyond a  
constant longing  
for love lost?  
But that's just me  
isn't it?  
If I could  
only remember  
who that was  
or when  
the memory of him  
slipped away.  
But all I can recall  
is something about  
my being employed  
as a data input clerk  
for an insurance firm  
in Lafayette Street.  
Certainly not enough  
to keep me going  
at the time.  
And even though  
these images  
are morphing  
into insignificance,  
I still contemplate  
transactions  
beyond legal boundaries  
seemingly justified  
for the  
the sake of eternity.